

A Sisters Promise: Group Seeking Mandated Background Checks For Service Employees

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BELLA VISTA WOMAN KEEPS VOW MADE AFTER SISTER RAPED, KILLED

Lucia Bone dreamed of buying a home next to her sister's where they could grow old together.

Bone's hopes shattered Aug. 27, 2001, the day her sister, Cathy Sue Weaver, was raped and beaten to death in her Orlando, Fla., home.

Jeffrey Hefling, a repairman, was hired in February 2001 to clean the air ducts in Weaver's home. The twice-convicted sex offender returned to her home six months later and murdered her. He then set her house on fire to conceal DNA evidence.

"In one second, our future was gone," Bone said.

Bone vomited when she received word of her sister's death. She couldn't understand who would commit such a crime and why.

"She was a very giving, caring person," she said of her best friend.

Hefling pleaded guilty last year to the crimes and received three consecutive life sentences plus 30 years.

It was at Weaver's memorial service Bone vowed to do something to make sure no other person or family experienced the pain she was feeling. Bone promised her sister she would make a difference.

She came through on that promise.

Last year Bone founded the Sue Weaver CAUSE — Consumer Awareness of Unsafe Service Employment — to promote personal safety awareness and legislation.

The nonprofit organization works to educate consumers and employers of the necessity of criminal background checks for workers entering homes.

The group has a 10-member board of directors. The diverse board has a common goal — to make a difference, she said.

Bone spends most of her time these days speaking to groups and trying to get new legislation passed.

She spoke to her mother-in-law's sorority Wednesday in Bella Vista.

She is now concentrating on Missouri, the sisters' home state. She planned Thursday to meet with a group she hopes will help promote the Sue Weaver CAUSE.

Three states — Florida, Georgia and Texas — have adopted legislation mandating background checks on service employees, such as repair workers.

Texas State Rep. Burt Solomons filed his state's version of the bill, which was adopted last year. He became interested in the cause after having a swimming pool installed at his home and later learning one of the workers was a convicted child molester, a legislative director said Thursday.

Lawmakers are cleaning up the bill this session to address some concern the law may limit the ability for someone with a criminal history to get a job.

General Electric, which is considering adopting the law as a company policy, contacted Solomons' office seeking more information about the bill, a legislative director said.

Not all companies are jumping on the bandwagon.

The Arkansas State Police conduct background checks for \$25, said Chief Deputy Jim Wozniak of the Bella Vista Division of the Benton County Sheriff's Office.

Most employers choose not to require a background check, because it takes between 30 and 60 days, he said.

"Most people want to hire someone now," Wozniak said. "It takes time and it's a pain in the butt."

Bone's not ready to give up.

It can take several weeks to get a background check that provides fingerprints, but a conviction record takes no time at all, she said.

The group's Web site — www.suweavercause.org — provides a list of people around the country who have been assaulted or killed by service personnel.

The only thing the attackers had in common is that none of the employers ran a background check, Bone said.

"This was an upper middle-class, white neighborhood," Bone said of her sister's home. "This type of crime has no demographic limitations, no racial limitations, no limitations at all."

A case is pending in Benton County Circuit Court for a Bentonville satellite installer charged last year with allegedly raping a customer.

Bone is a different woman since her sister's death.

"It hardened me," she said. "My heart will never be the same."

She has trouble letting people get too close, because "I can't go through that kind of pain again," she said.

The sisters each had their own custom embroidery and design digitizing companies, which brought them even closer. Bone decided in January to downsize her company.

"When she died, I lost my drive," she said. Bone now puts her energy into a cause she is passionate about — changing laws and changing the way employers operate.

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